

THE DEGRADATION

OF OUR

REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM,

AND ITS

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THE DEGRADATION
OF OUR
REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM,
AND ITS
REFORM.

BY J. FRANCIS FISHER.

PHILADELPHIA:
C. SHERMAN, SON & CO., PRINTERS.
1863.

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THE DEGRADATION
OF OUR
REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM.

WHATEVER may be the result of the bloody war now raging, it is presumed there is no one who does not see that it has already given such a shock to our republican institutions, that they will require great and important modifications, if not a reconstruction from their very foundation. Many changes must be made, both to give the requisite strength to the general Government, and to prevent that strength being abused; to consolidate the restored or diminished confederacy, and, at the same time, to save our local institutions, our personal liberties, from extinction; above all, to guard us, if possible, from the evils we have experienced in our system of election for National offices, especially, that of President of the United States; evils which will be greatly augmented in the inevitable consequence of the present war,—the enormous military power of the Executive.

In the happy days of the past, our countrymen seemed determined to shut their eyes to the rapid decay of public virtue in their representatives, whether in executive or legislative office; and, because our prosperity was unchecked, wealth every day rewarding industry and ingenuity, and our population swelling with unprecedented speed, they were disposed

to set all this to the credit of our admirable system of Government; fondly believing that, if their Legislatures were corrupt and their Chief Magistrates the tools and slaves of party, it was the strongest proof of the vigor of our Republican Institutions which could bear it all. Not perceiving that, in the degeneracy of our public men, and the debased tone of public morality, we were daily losing the virtues which are the only true supports of Democracy,—that the framework of our institutions was rotting away, the foundations of our Republic undermined, and the real buttresses of liberty destroyed. It is only now, when civil war has almost shaken the whole fabric to pieces, when our country is overwhelmed with difficulties of all sorts, and humiliated by defeats, and still more by the causes of them, that doubt and dismay are spreading throughout the land, and those who always confided in Democracy begin to doubt its ultimate success.

In this state of the popular mind, a hearing may be had for one, who has for a long time studied our Institutions by the light of History, and the tests of contemporary results; and who thinks he sees wherein they have failed, and the causes of the failure. These he will expose, with a plan of reform which, if capable of execution, seems to promise a restoration of the pristine virtues and honor of the Republic.

The following pages are presented to the public without hesitation, but with a good deal of diffidence. Every citizen who thinks he can say aught that will promote the good of his country in times of doubt and difficulty, should give utterance to the results of his reflections, however crude; for others may work them up, or they may suggest to superior minds better means of attaining the same end, either approximating or in opposition to his own.

It may be, that the same or similar plans have presented

themselves to others, and have been rejected as impracticable. Where the evils to be remedied are so flagrant, it seems hardly credible that some such scheme as the one to be proposed hereafter, has occurred to none of the many ingenious minds, who, for a long time, have been earnestly watching the working of our system of representation with sad misgivings.

But, if it has ever appeared in print on this side of the Atlantic, it has never met the eye of the writer. The work of Mr. Thomas Hare, which was procured after reading the high commendation of it, by Mr. I. Stuart Mills, in his work on Representative Government, printed last year, leads to the belief that he was the first European writer who, perceiving the evil of electing legislative bodies by majorities, suggested the remedy, by requiring the full complement of votes for each member, and uniting the minorities.

His work is admirably reasoned; and, although it seems absurd to add the commendation of an unknown writer to the high praises it received from Mr. Mills, it may be said that his arguments seem unanswerable, and nothing better could be done than to call for an American reprint of them, if it were not, that being based on English experience only, they leave the case imperfectly stated, or rather, not sustained by the overwhelming evidence the history of our country can give; and that his plan for voting, if practicable in England, would be utterly impossible here. This plan will be noticed hereafter.

The conclusion has therefore been adopted, without pretending to philosophical method, to accumulate the evidence to be had in America of the dangers, corruptions, and degradations of our representative system; and, as clearly as possible, to explain a method of reforming it by a mode of voting less complicated and unmanageable than that suggested by Mr. Hare,—a mode to which it seems the chief objection would

be, the opposition it would receive, not from those who would use it, but from those who have abused the existing system to their own purposes, viz., the large and powerful class of politicians.

The formation of this scheme, may be dated back some seven or eight years, in the course of which time, it has been often opened to various friends, and once, at least, in 1857, drawn out in a full plan of voting; but the conviction that it would be scouted by those who control public opinion, by all whose business it is to manage parties and carry elections, and perhaps set down as a Utopian project by patriots and statesmen, postponed its completion. The present state of our country at least gives a hope that it will not be rejected without consideration, and the approbation bestowed in England on the plan of Mr. Hare, inspires a belief that this contemporary creation of an American may also have its merits.

The differences are so essential, as to relieve the author of any charge of plagiarism, even without the preceding explanation.

If in England, where universal suffrage and an equal apportionment of votes, according to numbers and equal territorial divisions, has not yet been introduced, it is found that the system of electing by majorities, in large constituencies, is so far from being fair and impartial, that it really tends to disfranchise a large part of the inhabitants of every district, and that, so far from giving to the great centres of commerce and manufactures, where the nearest approach to our system exists, the advantage over the much-abused borough representations, it generally procures for them members of the least weight for character and abilities of all in Parliament,—it may well induce a pause by the advocates of universal suffrage as the panacea for all political evils.

This result may be a great surprise to the enthusiastic re-

former who has convinced himself that nothing but evil can come from aristocratic rule, and that it is only necessary to give an equal share of political rights to every inhabitant of a country, to call forth universal intelligence and secure good government for all; but many wise men in our country, where the system has had a fair trial, have come to an opposite result.

Little is understood in England of our system of caucus and primary elections, by which party nominations are managed and by which a few men who devote themselves to politics by profession (men little known beyond their own sphere, and very little respected there), organize all the initiatory steps towards a nomination of candidates, and so skilfully manage their forces by a system of secret understanding and pledges, that it is impossible for any one to be presented to the public as a candidate, except the one selected by them in secret conclave. This is the inevitable result of our system, and it may be asserted, that it is not the consequence of the neglect of these primary meetings by those who have the largest interest at stake, and who, by their intelligence, education, and social standing, ought to have most weight among their fellow-citizens. Their attendance at these meetings might have a sort of ephemeral success, but it would only result in carrying the machinery a little more out of sight, and perhaps, rather aggravating the evil.

These primary party meetings, being governed in nothing by law or principle, but controlled entirely by party tactics, and worked for the sole benefit of those who manage them, would, as soon as they failed to attain the ends of these professional politicians, be sure to be packed by men selected in secret places; and we should again be forced into the old track, be obliged to submit to the dictation of a class of men the least trustworthy, who have thus juggled out of sight all but

a single candidate, whom we must take, or be sure of a defeat by our opponents.

This system of nomination has the additional disastrous effect of disgusting a large number among our most respectable and intelligent citizens. They find that both parties have presented for their suffrage men whom they cannot trust, perhaps know to be dishonest, and vote for neither. This again gives great advantage to the political managers, and often throws the election into the hands of an actual minority, even when there are only two candidates in the field.

In England there are rarely three candidates for a single place, and Mr. Hare goes into a calculation to show that even where the votes are fairly polled, and the majority clearly ascertained, the candidate is by no means sure to represent his supposed constituency; and this is, for greater reason, true in our country, where a still larger number always abstain from voting. He maintains what we well know by our experience, that those who have voted against the member returned, are as effectually disfranchised as if they had been excluded by law from the polls; and their wishes, representations and interests are utterly without weight till the period of the next election.

The members constituting the House, are of course governed by a party majority, which majority is again controlled by a majority of their own party members, generally the most violent and extreme of all. In this country we have no independent middle men in our legislative assemblies; no *centre droit* and *centre gauche*, ready to check extreme measures either of government or opposition. The leaders of the party carry everything—none dare resist. An independent member is impossible. This is the necessary consequence of our American system, and the result is an Oligarchy the worst and most unprincipled of all,—an Oligarchy of demagogues, in which a

certain show is made of carrying out popular views and wishes, but these views and wishes are the very suggestions of their leaders, who well know how to blind their constituents and stimulate their passions, and who, by the fiction of representing a majority, impose the weight of force and the terrorism of numbers, and often carry legislative measures which have the reluctant assent of the more honest and moderate of their colleagues, and which, if presented to the unbiassed judgment of the constituents of their own party, would probably be reprobated and rejected.

One among many of the evil consequences of this system is the want of stability in the policy of the Government. The party in the ascendant is sure, however small its preponderance of votes, to carry out their programme to the last letter; and this is sometimes the most politic course for those who are ready to sacrifice their country to the success of their party; but it is nevertheless difficult to preserve this ascendancy beyond the current term of office; for the party defeated at the polls, swollen by the addition of the discontented members of the successful one, or those of a third division previously voting on neither side, or for a third candidate, is often quite sufficient to displace the small majority before the next election.

The consequence is a new scramble for offices and spoils, and very often an entire revolution in measures, in which stability of purpose is almost as important as a wise financial or political policy.

But of all the evil consequences of this unstable possession of power, the most obnoxious is a party measure peculiar to our country, invented, it is said, by one of the early Democratic Governors of Massachusetts, from whom it has its appellation,—Gerrymandering. A more unprincipled scheme, and one more opposed to the true principles of Democracy, never was imagined or put in practice; its object being so to

arrange the electoral districts as to neutralize the votes of the opposing party, massing their votes together in some places where their ascendancy cannot be disputed, detaching counties, townships or wards from their natural connection to destroy an existing majority, or to create it where wanted to maintain party ascendancy; and all this without any regard to territorial connection, common interests, or any other consideration but the control of votes. This is so notorious and of such constant practice, that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon it to my American readers; it is one of the monstrous evils arising out of our mode of electing by local majorities, which cries out for reform,—a reform not easily to be obtained from the class of men who govern us, and who consider this as a most valuable part of their political machinery.

Desperate men clutch at any means of safety; and a party, finding itself in a real minority, will often reconcile itself even to the sacrifice of its own principles and the most sacred guarantees of liberty and civil rights to secure their power. This is most conspicuously plain in the mode by which votes, outside of party organization, are bought; and, I am sorry to add, by that political division heretofore calling itself conservative, and claiming to contain within it the greater part of the wealth, education, and respectability of the country. The leaders, finding it difficult to contend against the prestige of democratic name, secured to that great political sect by Jefferson, its first prophet, and by Jackson, its second incarnation, have been willing to ally themselves with those extreme and often dangerous factions founded in fanaticism or the basest instincts of man. Thus they have advocated by turns Teetotalism, Antimasonry, Abolitionism, encouraged the Dorrite rebellion in Rhode Island and the Anti-rent movement in New York, tolerated among them the disciples of St. Simon, Fourier, and Fanny Wright, and, what perhaps was

worst of all, were willing to sacrifice the most sacred principles of liberty in an independent judiciary, the great result of the Revolution of 1688 in our mother country, the great achievement of those patriots who for centuries had been the enemies and victims of arbitrary power,—power inconceivably more dangerous when possessed by a majority than when held by one.

I do not give any credit to the so-called Democracy for rejecting or opposing these dangerous opinions and projects. It would have been gratuitous mischief with them, for they generally had the majority at home, and were always kept in check by the great party at the South, who could not jeopard their own chartered interests by tolerating among their allies any principle likely to undermine them; and who, with all the evils of their social constitution, were generally free from the pernicious influence of Socialism and Infidelity.

It is not easy to estimate the mischief which the existence of a third party in the State can do, when the elections depend on simple majorities or pluralities. Its leaders may be honest and offer their votes to the party second in numerical strength, provided it will adopt their social or political creed and shibboleth; or, they may make a bargain for themselves, and a share of offices and the spoils of victory may be a part of their conditions; or if the minority party cannot make the sacrifice, or rather advocate what would revolt all the intelligent and honest men of their political communion, the plurality, without any such sacrifice, may secure the victory by encouraging a third nomination, which will work equally well for their success, and the arrangements of such a bargain may defy detection.

To present this point in a clearer view, I would cite an example from our history; one of those events in our national life upon which depends, for weal or woe, a long series of con-

sequences. The result, as traced to the present point, is not to be mistaken, and there is still behind the cloud we are passing through, a train of miseries not to be estimated now.

I speak of the Presidential contest, when Henry Clay was defeated by James K. Polk. The decision was in the hands of the Abolition party. None knew better than their leaders that Mr. Clay was at heart opposed to slavery; that he had set his face resolutely against the acquisition of Texas on the ground that it would extend slave territory and power, and had pledged his opposition to it, and that this alone prevented his receiving enough Southern votes to ensure his election. They knew, too, that every vote for a candidate of their own was in effect given to the nominee of the slaveholders; yet they persisted in nominating and voting for Birney, which deprived Mr. Clay of the whole electoral vote of New York, and thus ensured his defeat.

Thus the nation lost the last chance we have ever had of a great President, and the best opportunity of putting the slave-power, as it is called, in its proper place. Had Texas been excluded, the contest for the territories would have ended there; and we can hardly doubt that, under the presidency of such a man as Mr. Clay, whose temper was at the same time so brave and conciliatory, and to whose course we owe so much in appeasing controversy and settling difficulties, some plan would have been devised not only for taking the question out of the field of party controversy, but for the gradual removal of its worst features, and, with God's assistance, for its eventual extinction.

But the first consequence of the election of Mr. Polk was the annexation of Texas, an act fruitful of evils, and the war with Mexico, which it provoked, and the spirit of aggression and filibustering which it fostered, were unquestionably causes of disease in our body politic, tending to its dissolution.

Could Texas have existed as a neighboring State, as an outlet to all the violent and discontented vagabonds of the South, and a market for all their surplus negroes, it would have been a great gain to us; and the more power they acquired as a separate nation, whether in friendship or at enmity with us, the better. As a barrier to all future acquisition at the South, and a receptacle for all the population, black and white, which we could best spare, its very existence would have added strength to our free institutions and purified them.

All this was said then, but without effect upon those in whose hands the decision rested, men who called themselves friends of the negro and of universal liberty. Was it fatuity or was it corruption?

This naturally leads to a consideration of our mode of nominating and choosing our highest magistrate, the President of the United States; and here the perversions of our electoral system will be found the greatest of all.

It may have been expected by the wise and good men who framed our Constitution, that in devising this plan of choice through electoral colleges, and giving to the whole work an apparent solemnity and dignity which the occasion demanded, they would impress upon their fellow-citizens, to whom this great trust and duty was committed, a solemn sense of their obligation to their country and posterity. That the gravest, wisest, purest men would be sought for, to meet in conclave, and choose from among those of the nation most distinguished by their services, their talents, and their virtues, one to whom all would bow as most worthy to conduct the State. Now mark the result: In the first place, we have a primary meeting organized and managed as those for common elections, from which proceed delegates (whom no one would trust in his own affairs) to a State caucus. This caucus appoints to the National *Party* Convention men with whom they

can make the best bargain for themselves. The next step is the party nomination for President, the most important of all, taken under circumstances the most adverse possible to a good selection. Then the State election, by a doubtful majority, in which citizens have only a choice between the nominees of the great parties. Finally, a meeting of the electoral colleges for dumbshow and a dictated vote,—and this is the nation's choice for its highest office, in many respects an uncontrolled dictatorship for four years. And who is the nation's choice for its highest office? A man of the finest abilities, the noblest character, the most distinguished services? No! The man who is admitted to be superior to all, even though he be leader of one of the great parties, will probably lose the nomination of his own political allies, which will be given instead to some obscure politician of moderate abilities and doubtful integrity. The reason is, that the former is not, and the latter is an *available* candidate. A leading statesman has excited jealousy, has committed himself to certain principles, has a settled policy and a firm will, and is not to be dictated to. He cannot be moulded by those who manage the nomination, will not engage to be their tool, or to place in their hands his official patronage. He has his own confidential adherents, and will select his advisers and high officials from among them. He is, in a word, too proud a man to truckle to these party managers, and too honest a one to buy his election by the spoils of political victory. Such a man will not do.

An *available* candidate may be one who has some source of popularity independent of political services. A rough and honest soldier, a rude backwoodsman who has raised himself from the humblest condition, has sometimes fairer claims to popularity than the statesman who has passed through a life of political intrigue. A popular sobriquet is better than a

title of honor to him. Old Tippecanoe, with his log cabin and hard cider, old Rough and Ready, and "the honest Bargeman and Rail-splitter," have alone in forty years achieved a victory over the Democratic party.* In such cases, the corruptions and malversations of a preceding administration may have rendered statesmanship a suspicious qualification, and a reputation for honesty would therefore have the more influence, while the rude tastes and jovial habits of the candidate in former life might become additional sources of popularity. Those who look out for such a candidate to offer to the people, do not on their own account particularly desire ability, and *for them*, honesty may be a very inconvenient quality if allied with unreasonable *firmness*. They would rather rely on inexperience to submit in everything to their guidance, and indeed such a candidate must naturally rely upon the friends to whom he owes his success, and gladly promises to make all appointments by their advice. A bargain is therefore made, which, if he be an honest man, he will bitterly repent, and woe to him if he break it. But these instances have been the exceptions, and are among the few successful efforts of the party claiming for itself pre-eminent respectability.

The great Democratic party, which has controlled the nation with few intervals, has not had occasion to descend to such resorts, but has generally nominated a man who has enough political experience to know how to trim his sails to the breeze; enough ability and dignity to fill the chair of state without reproach; of easy principles, but true to his party obligations, and to be relied on by the managers of the election that they shall have a full share of influence and patronage.

* So, too, with our gubernatorial candidates. The supporters of an anti-Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania showed in testimony of his qualifications his ill-written and ill-spelt receipts as a wagoner.

It is, unhappily, no defamation to assert that through the whole process of our Presidential nominations, from the primary meeting which selects a member for the State caucus up to the final vote in the electoral college, there is an uninterrupted intrigue and traffic for office and emolument, till, by a triple distillation of corruption, we have presented to us as a result, *the only possible successor of George Washington.*

It cannot be necessary to prove this to any one who has watched the progress of a Presidential canvass, if that is the proper name for a system contrived to render impossible the intelligent selection and the honest choice of the whole people.

There still remains to be noticed the most monstrous perversion of the original design,—THE GENERAL TICKET, a system which would seem to have been contrived for the express purpose of throwing the nomination into the hands of the vilest political blacklegs in the great States, to stifle all adverse majorities in the several counties of these States, to override the electoral colleges in the smaller States, and eventually to place in office a man who has only a minority of the popular votes,—it might be only a small minority,—and sometimes, as in our last disastrous election, to give us a purely sectional candidate elected by a bare plurality.

It requires but little reflection to perceive that, but for the general ticket system, Mr. Lincoln would not have been elected, and the rebellion of the South, wanting its pretext, could not have occurred.

It is unnecessary to make further reference to the mode in which are chosen the delegates to the great national party convention for nominating a President, or to describe the character of those who compose it, or the influences which prevail there. It is notorious, that the delegation of each State is managed and directed by one or more skilful tacticians, who have other things in view besides the honor of their

country, and who well know how to secure at the same time, every party and personal advantage. A man who can offer the entire State ticket of twenty or thirty votes has *carte blanche* for himself and his friends.

The rest of the business is simply a farce, got up in conformity with an obsolete programme. The electoral ticket is taken without examination; the names on it are utterly unknown to the greater part of the citizens. If the requisite majority or plurality of votes can only be had, by fair means or foul, the dumbshow is acted at the State capital, and the great game is won.

It was not the intention of our Constitution, to give the choice of President to the States, but to the people, or rather the trusted and trustworthy delegates of the people of the whole country; and that every section and every class of men should, if possible, be fairly represented. Were the Presidential electors chosen in each Congressional district by majorities, we should not indeed obtain a perfect consummation of this wish, but there would be at least an approximation towards it. Two results, however, of incalculable advantage would be attained: *first*, the frustration of the mighty system of intrigue and corruption which now prevails; and, *secondly*, the breaking up of the overwhelming power of the great States. No large State could give its entire vote to one candidate; in fact, each of the great parties would secure its own election in every district where it had strength; and above all, neither party could *afford* to be *sectional*, from the necessity of seeking some of its votes in opposite sections of the country. Thus every question dangerous to the Union would be stifled, and the pandering to local prejudice and local fanaticism, which has brought about all our unhappy divisions, would be equally reprobated by the politician and the patriot.

Great space has been given to the subject of primary elections, of caucus nominations, and party management, because these are the chief evils of our American representative system. We have now to consider, as briefly as possible, the operation of our actual elections.

It has been thought by many, who have based their opinion on the result, that an electoral system which has tended and still tends more and more to exclude from office the best men, and to place in our National and State Legislatures a body of political intriguers, among whom corruption is so prevalent as to cease to be a reproach, must have its radical vice in the character of the constituency; that, in fact, the suffrage is too widely extended, and that some means must be found to limit it by a qualification of property, especially in land. "Those who own the country," say they, "should govern the country." But there is good reason for asserting, that under a Republican government, the first principle should be to extend the suffrage to all who can appreciate it as an obligation, and value it as a privilege. No inhabitants as a class, however humble, should be debarred from an easy acquisition of the right; but, in order to give the electoral privilege a value to its possessor, he must owe it to some effort of his own, or have inherited it from a worthy parent. It must be something which the idle profligate vagabond, the criminal, the brawler, and the sot have forfeited or never acquired. This prerogative of citizenship, he should hold as an honor, a badge of respectability, and every man worthy of possessing it will gladly work for it, and try to use it to his own real advantage and honor, and if so, to that of the community. The only tests we have for this qualification, are material ones; but they may and ought to be within the reach of any industrious man, and should be various in form in order to give no undue advantage to any kind of property or department of industry; thus, the

possession or lease of a small portion of cultivated land, the sole tenancy of a dwelling-house, a small investment in public stocks, the previous year's service in a salaried employment, or a poll-tax to the value of at least a bushel of wheat or a day's labor: these, or such as these, would give some guarantee of respectability, and the greater number who can present themselves with such qualifications, the sounder and safer will be our Republican Institutions.

To inspire an honest pride in the rank of citizen, we must take care not to share it with those who are the objects of his contempt, and the self-respect which will be felt by the poor laborer, when he has established by his industry, his right to a political equality with the richest of the land, will surely give an impulse to higher aspirations, and often be the first step to personal distinction.

Such a proposition as this, cannot be charged with aristocracy or exclusiveness; all that it asserts is this, That an independence and a real interest in the prosperity of his country, ought to be requisites in an elector, without which, he will not put a just value on the franchise. The class of emigrants, who have not thought citizenship worth their fee of naturalization, and the native inhabitants who have valued it below their poll-tax, are surely not worthy of the privileges and that there are many such, is proved by these payments being almost always part of a candidate's expenses. How much more is paid for individual votes, only those who manage elections can tell. It cannot be supposed that bribery in this form, is practicable to any great extent.

But there is a form of corruption much more injurious and iniquitous, because the price stipulated is to be paid by the successful candidate in the form of office or lucrative contracts to those who have brought their influence to bear on the election. There is a class of men in every populous district, espe-

cially our cities, themselves of no great consideration, but in positions which give them large influence over a number of the humbler inhabitants. These men have it in their power to offer to either candidate a certain number of votes, and so sure are they of their commodity, that when there are a number of offices to be filled at an election, they have been known to traffic them to a candidate on one ticket, for as many votes for an office on another ticket, in the success of which they felt more interest; and of such uncertain domicile is this class of votes, that those who contract to supply them often can transfer a score or more of them from one electoral district to another on the eve of an election. It is needless to enlarge on the venality of this class of vote-brokers, but the purification of the suffrage in the manner just proposed, would probably put an end to the business, as the plan hereafter to be proposed for a united suffrage would unquestionably do. This class of men can indeed only find an occupation in the large centres of population. There is, however, another class of working politicians, both in town and country, whose services must be secured. The orator of the tap-room, the needy lawyer of the county town, who spends his evenings at the store or tavern, doing the work of the candidate and party, deserves his reward and obtains it. He is indispensable under the present system, and may be a very honest man.

This reference to our custom of voting at the same time for a number of offices, recalls an omission in speaking of the various corruptions in our nominating caucuses. In framing these tickets, especially for county and corporation offices, it cannot be pretended that the nomination is made with reference to the fitness of the person proposed. It is a pure bargain among the leading managers of the party, and in consequence, the greatest pressure is brought to bear on the electors to give success to the whole ticket, and he is denounced as a

traitor to his party, who ventures to scratch from his ticket the name of a man he knows to be dishonest, even if the office he aspires to be one of the largest pecuniary trust.

This system of "bullying," is worse than bribery. The tyranny of opinion is often supported by violence: the chief end of preliminary ward meetings in our large cities is to organize the party forces; and the great public assemblages or mass meetings have no other conceivable object than to impose the overpowering influence of numbers,—the worst but often the most successful of arguments.

In the mother country, the canvassing is conducted with some corruption and some violence, but at least with a better show of fairness. From the opening meeting to the final polling, the two candidates and their friends address all the voters, and in the very animated scenes on the hustings, arguments are exchanged as well as jokes and taunts; at all events, the whole constituency knows all that both sides have to say for themselves. It is, in a measure, the same thing in the Southern States. At the great political meetings called barbecues, as well as at the hustings, in those States, where *viva voce* voting is maintained, the orators of both sides are listened to, and the citizen, however humble, has a better right to the conviction on which he votes, than the well-educated inhabitants of a Northern town who has only listened to a one-sided harangue, or taken his facts and his principles from the party newspaper which is his daily reading.

It may be thought a somewhat bold assertion, that the respectable citizen who, when a great question is agitating the passions of the nation, daily reads the newspapers of his own party and none others, who avoids the society of those of opposite opinions, and has brought himself to believe that loyalty consists in supporting every measure advocated by his party, is not better fitted to give his vote intelligently, than the

humble and illiterate laborer who gets his notions of politics in places of resort which the other would think disreputable. But this is very often the fact.

When the character of the leading newspapers is considered, sold as they are to party; how utterly every principle yields with them to considerations of policy; how truth is suppressed or garbled, and falsehood unblushingly asserted; how villainous acts are palliated and bad men praised; how the Constitution is contemned and the law of nations and of war, as well as every dictate of our holy religion, disregarded; how opinions which to-day are advocated are repudiated on the morrow;* we cannot help perceiving that the moral poison from this corrupted source must permeate the minds of those who make such matter their daily food, till at last the distinction between right and wrong is obliterated, and acts and opinions are justified at which a little while before the conscience would have stood aghast, and with which we may hope it will still be shocked when the spell is broken.

The national heart cannot always be corrupted by unholy passions; the national intellect cannot always be blinded. Roused to action by unaccustomed distress and difficulties, it will speak for itself, and demand other leaders and other organs. *The truth must prevail.*

The people are beginning to be convinced that those called their representatives are unworthy of the great charge committed to them. The reason is now to be told them,—that they are *not their representatives*. Can those represent a people in any office with whose selection they have nothing to do? Whom they have perhaps accepted as their candidates

* It is not intended to apply this character to the whole newspaper press, although the number of independent journals is very small which always dare to give utterance to their own convictions.

with reluctance, and only voted for under necessity and party dictation? Whose very nomination may have driven many from the polls with disgust, and who were opposed from the first by the votes of a large minority of worthy and intelligent citizens, who distrusted their honesty or abhorred their political opinions and aims? And who still work against them, in the hope of driving from power, at the next election, men who, in their opinion, are ready to sacrifice their dearest interests, and those of their country? Unquestionably, No! And thus our boasted system of popular representation, which the wisdom of antiquity having failed to invent, it was reserved to our Anglo-Saxon ancestors to devise, has proved *in our hands* a failure, a preposterous fiction. No institutions have stood long, which have a falsehood at their base,—nor can ours.

If it were necessary, it would not be difficult to trace in the vices of our representative system, here exposed, the causes of all our National calamities; but we may accept as an established truth the utterance of the people's voice, now heard in every quarter, that our political leaders are chiefly answerable for the cruel and unnatural war now rending every tie which common origin, a common religion, a common history, and nearer and dearer relations than these, had been forming since our ancestors sought on these shores a refuge from poverty and oppression in other lands.

It is a false assertion that our diversities of climate and occupation and domestic institutions necessarily dissociated us in feelings, in interests, and political objects; that we could not live together in peace. Never were national institutions better designed for harmonizing and maintaining a great people, and leading it on in a course of boundless prosperity. Like the work of the Divine hand in the mechanism of the heavens, and the contrivances of organic life; or, like the

humbler work of man in the great engines of manufacturing industry, and the beautiful inventions of naval architecture, such was the fitness of our National and State institutions to work together, such the happy adaptation of checks and balances (some of the most important of which consisted in the very contrariety of our occupations and form of property) that justice and equal rights were everywhere maintained; and it is incredible that our great Republic should have subsisted for more than seventy years without those very differences.

From many a difficulty with foreign nations, from many an internal convulsion, from many a mischievous reform, we have been saved by the opposing forces on one side or the other; and, if our financial policy has not always been wise or just, yet the sources of wealth were everywhere so great, the products of agriculture so various and abundant, and our manufacturing industry and commerce so enormous, that we became as a united nation the most self-sustaining people upon earth; every department of labor furnishing and demanding the supplies of the other. But for the meddling fanaticism of a sectional party, working for years with insidious zeal, and the hatred it naturally engendered, increased perhaps among the indolent and thriftless portions of the Southern populace, by envy of the greater prosperity of the North (sentiments on both sides, which served as ready weapons to those whose only object was to gain political power by stimulating prejudices which they often did not share) there never would have been a serious quarrel between North and South.

The opportunity was thus given through our vicious system of representation to a few leaders on both sides, whose aim was mastery or the disruption of the Union; to break up a Government justly dear to great majorities in every division of our country, and to inaugurate a war the end of which no one can predict,—but which, whether it be the subjugation

tion and forced submission of the South, or the breaking up of our confederacy, may in its consequences be almost equally deplorable. Under any circumstances, the working machinery of our Constitution is broken down; the Government, as it is, cannot go on much longer.

What remedy is there?

Some persons seem to look to Military Despotism, which history shows has been the ordinary refuge of a people from Democratic misrule. But it is a desperate remedy, which nothing but anarchy can justify. It never can restore a nation's healthful vigor—only preserve a paralyzed existence. Our people are too good and sensible, too proud and brave for this. They ought to be able to choose their rulers; and surely could do so, if our present miserable machinery for popular elections were cleared away.

Mr. Hare is believed to be the first writer who published to the world the true principle of popular elections, viz., that the person elected to a legislative office *should represent a totality*. That his constituents should be voters among whom there must be no opposition. That those who, according to the system now prevailing, are in the minority, and not in any way represented, should be able to combine with others of common interests and principles, wherever they can be found, and return a representative of their own.

His plan, which regards England alone, may be briefly explained as follows:

Firstly. There must be secured a registry of all the qualified voters in the kingdom, and the number being ascertained, this amount, or what perhaps would be practically better, the largest number of votes ever given in a general election must be divided by the number of representatives to be chosen,—the product of this division being the number of

votes which each member of Parliament would represent, and must really obtain, to secure his election.

Secondly. Every voter is to be supplied from the office of General Registry with a certified ticket or voting paper, on which he is to inscribe the name of the person he would prefer as his representative, and add from the whole list of candidates previously published, the names of those he would select as his second and third choice, and as many more as he pleases. The voting paper being handed in at the place of election, they must be forwarded to the Registrar's Office for examination, where all who have obtained the requisite number of votes by inscription on the first line of the voting paper, will be declared elected.

As it is presumed that many gentlemen of distinguished talents and popularity will be the first choice of a larger number of voters than they require, their names are to be stricken off as first choice on all the surplus, leaving another name first on the list, which being collated with the remaining voting tickets, will help to secure the election of another candidate. This process is to be continued until, if possible, the whole number of representatives is made up.

The scheme is, it is thought, correctly described, without entering into all the particulars; but it does not appear what device is found out for filling the remaining seats, in case, after the whole examination of voting papers, there are a few which have not secured the full complement of votes. It may be done either by taking majorities, or referring back the voting papers for a new election.

It may perhaps be thought presumption to offer an opinion as to the practical working of such a system of voting in England. With their limited suffrage, it might be practicable; but two serious objections occur. In so enormous a constituency—the whole body of voters in a country—few can

know anything of the qualifications of the different candidates, or even their political principles. After naming the first choice, the other names will, in most cases, be dictated, or selected on hearsay, or at haphazard; and if they are all to be written, unless an officer at the polls inscribes them, bad penmanship would make difficulties, and great frauds would probably be practised on unlettered voters.

The second difficulty occurs at the Registrar's office, where it is conceivable that many great frauds may be practised, which we need not at present advert to. It would seem, at first sight, very easy to count the voting papers and arrange the voting lists according to the order of preference by the voters; though this indeed would require enormous labor and an army of clerks, with whom undoubted integrity would be indispensable. There would indeed be no doubt about the election of those who have the full complement of votes on the first line of the voting tickets. But when the names are to be stricken off of the surplus tickets, from what tickets shall they be erased? For the second in order after the successful candidate is not always the same. Are the clerks or the registrar to have the right to decide who among the "second liners" shall have the vote? Who shall select the tickets for erasure? This is an opportunity for favor and corruption which cannot be admitted, and would be fatal to the honest working of the system. Mr. Hare can perhaps suggest a remedy; but as none now occurs to the writer, he will proceed to explain his own plan, which may have many defects of its own, but is at least not liable to these objections.

As in the plan of Mr. Hare, it is necessary that the electoral lists should be made out for a certain time before each election. This interval might be six months, when a full alphabetical catalogue of all the qualified votes on the Regis-

trar's lists should be made out, printed, published in the newspapers, and the local lists affixed in public places. For three months after this, there should be given an opportunity to claim the right of voting by those whose names are not on the lists; after which, there should be no claim received or allowed. The number of qualified voters in the whole of a State having been ascertained, this number, or (as is suggested in Mr. Hare's plan) that of the largest number of votes ever polled, or a mean between them, must be divided by the number of representatives allotted to the State in the national Congress; or, in case of the State elections, by the number which fills the quota of either house of Assembly. This number being fixed as the constituency of each representative to be chosen, he is expected to procure the full number of votes, or a very near approximation to it; but with liberty to seek them anywhere within the limits of the State, among the qualified voters. The reason why the dividend may safely be reduced below that of the whole number of qualified votes, is that the whole vote of a State is never given, and the proportion abstaining can always be calculated with a great approach to accuracy.

Immediately after the date of closing the Registrar's office for claims, he should issue voting tickets or certificates of the right of suffrage to every person entitled to it, a separate one for every office he has the right to vote for, so prepared as to guard against forgery or alteration. This voting certificate is not understood to be only an authority to the citizen to give his ballot at the polls, but a ticket to be assigned to the candidate of his choice in writing before an officer appointed for such purpose, as, for instance, a notary public. And this assignment might be made at any time within ten days of the election, either at the notary's office, or, in case of inability from sickness, at the house of the elector.

The next point to be considered is the nomination of candidates. For this we may find an example in England, where primary meetings and all their abominations have been unknown. Any body of respectable citizens, whose names and position might be expected to give weight to their recommendation, might meet in public or private and nominate a candidate to represent themselves and all others with whom they were united in interest or in questions of public policy.

Thus we may suppose the great industrial divisions of our country, the commercial, manufacturing, agricultural, or mining interests would present their separate candidates; selecting from among men of the highest ability in the country, those who will best sustain their cause in the public councils of the nation, leaving them unpledged in other matters. The candidate being named, the meeting would then nominate a canvassing committee consisting of fifty or five hundred members, whose names should be all immediately published, as well as the proceedings of the meeting and their address to the public.

The nomination might be made immediately after the publication of the electoral list, and the canvass at once commenced. This may be done as in England, by approaching the electors at their homes, or addressing them at meetings, explaining the objects of the nominating body, and giving assurances of the character and principles of the candidate, procuring the promise of votes, and continuing their progress through the country till their complement was made up, and their work done. The electors would then present themselves before the notary to assign their votes, and the election would be complete.

From the great number of votes to be secured, it might seem, at first sight, that the canvass would be peculiarly laborious, but the difficulty is not so great as it appears.

It being understood that immediately after the nomination a publication is to be made stating the name, character, and principles of the nominee, the names of the committee, and the place of their headquarters or central office, at which all who favor the election may be invited to hand in their names, we may readily suppose a large number will be voluntarily offered; moreover, the circuit of the committee need not be very large, for, as the nomination is made by the representatives of some great interest or leading opinion, the field of inquiry is much narrowed, if not entirely confined to citizens of cognate principles or interests, so that the canvassers would know exactly among what class of men to find their votes.

And here appears one of the chief recommendations of the system, inasmuch as it tends to unite together all the grades of society in the support of the same candidate; for the moment a nomination is made of a gentleman of eminent worth and abilities, who is to be the special representative of one of the great interests of the country, he ought to be equally secure of the support of the great proprietors, or heads of the business, and of every one whose present maintenance and future hopes are involved in the success of that great department, whether commerce, manufactures, agriculture, mining, or the various other subdivisions of industry.

The prosperity of commerce is not less important to the merchant than it is to the ship-builder or chandler, the sail-maker, as well as the sailor, the truckman or the stevedore. That of manufactures equally involves the mill-owner, the machinist, the spinner, the weaver and the numerous bands of operatives connected with the great establishments. Under the proposed system of representation, it would become the business of the heads of every branch of trade, not only to show by argument to every one in their employ the identity of their interests, but to prove it to them by affording the

best possible wages, and perhaps giving a special interest in the profits; moreover, to secure their regard by kind attentions and considerate treatment. By these means, mutual good feeling and dependence would be created in the fairest possible way, and a sort of sentiment aroused analogous to clanship. Political economy would cease to be a matter of cold calculation. The hard-hearted mill-owner, the ill-paid, disheartened and debased operative would be replaced by workmen and employers who know and trust each other,—sharing prosperity and adversity without envy or discontent,—holding the same views of politics and government, and in the choice of their representatives always united.

In taking the great industrial interests of our country as the chief bonds of union, and the most probable and efficient combinations in nominating for representative offices, I do not forget that there are other and much higher principles actuating men, even in their views of government; for although almost all our legislation has reference to property, and the chief machinery of administration is for its protection, yet there are also some other and higher ends, affecting our religious and moral natures, which it may be possible to promote or establish by government means. That these would be overlooked or neglected by the eminent men we may suppose elected by the great industrial bodies of the country is not to be supposed. Religion, education, science, art, all not only aid the success of each department, but, being essential to human progress and the happiness and honor of life, they would be peculiarly the objects of encouragement in assemblies, where men of the highest education and worth would take the place now occupied by political adventurers.

But the popular mind does not always work with regularity, and sometimes refuses to run in the old track, though that lead to success and prosperity. At times our citizens, or a

portion of them, appear to forget their own interest, and even their duties, and, embracing the opinions of the enthusiastic reformers of society, insist on carrying into action their newly learnt principles. Let, then, the apostles of social and political reform be heard; let them even have a place in our legislative assemblies, if they can secure the requisite number of votes; let the advocates of emancipation, or temperance, or antimasonry, or agrarianism make their nominations, canvass for votes, and, if they can, elect their member; but let them not combine with any other organization, corrupt the principle of representation, and purchase, by the transfer of their votes, the advocacy of projects which have no affinity with the principles of the great industrial parties forming themselves in their neighborhood.

Should the representatives of these opinions obtain an election, they would have the best opportunity of advocating them. They would be listened to by the first minds in the country, and it might be that the reforms they urge would in some manner or to some extent be adopted; or, having been confuted and rejected in the great council of the nation, representing, as it would do, the whole people, they would sink with their advocates into insignificance and silence.

But we must now return from this digression to the plan of voting, which has not yet been fully developed.

The quota of electoral tickets having been completely made up and assigned to the member elect, he will retain them until he presents them to the official of the House to which he is chosen, as his *unquestioned and unquestionable* certificate of election. Should he have had the offer of a larger number of votes than is necessary for his election, he has only to suggest their transfer to some other candidate of similar views and principles who had not yet made up his complement. In this man-

ner, the minorities would coalesce until they formed complete constituencies.

Thus far, each elected member would represent a whole, and by the process above described, we may reasonably conclude that most of the places would be filled; but as it is hardly possible that the whole number of members should be elected, each with the full complement of votes he is supposed to represent, it is to be considered in what way the seats still vacant from a deficiency of votes are to be filled.

It would probably be as near an approximation as need be to the principle of the above scheme of voting, if those candidates who had received the greatest number short of totality of votes should be declared elected, provided they presented the tickets of two-thirds of the number of their constituency; and if at last, in consequence of the number of candidates, there should still be a place unfilled by a member qualified by such a vote, a new election should be called, at which the voting tickets which had not been effective at the previous election might be again used according to the system above described.*

An advantage which is almost certain to accrue from this system, would be the extinction of bribery, or the purchase of votes. The great number of votes to be procured would almost render it impossible, and the facility of obtaining them in any

* It might be objected to this plan, that it would only work well in the larger States, at least in the elections for Congress; that in the smaller, it would be impossible to secure a totality vote. In that case, a majority of two-thirds might be accepted as the nearest possible approach; or the candidate might be permitted to seek his votes in the bordering States; for the members of our lower House of Congress represent people, and not territory; and with certain limitations, the State boundary might be as little regarded as that of a county; for interest and opinions, not neighborhood, are the real bonds of union in a constituency.

district, would make it altogether unnecessary; for if bribery in a limited constituency, as in the English elections, where the parties are the richest in the land, is ruinous to the candidates, how would it be possible with us, in a constituency of more than ten thousand votes? Moreover, it is only in elections by majorities that the doubtful votes command a price. Here we should not have a scale to be turned, but a measure to be filled, and a large field to gather from. The very publicity of the record would be a safeguard; and if there were still a doubt, an oath might be administered to candidates or constituents, that the vote was neither given nor received under threats or promise of reward. Under the present system, there is great facility of corruption, and owing to the secrecy of the vote, detection is nearly impossible.

The secret ballot must be of course abandoned; but instead of this being a sacrifice of independence, it would rather secure it. The elector (especially if the simple standard of respectability were established which has been before suggested), would regard his vote as a duty to his country, and perform it without fear or favor; and so far would he be from dreading the intimidation of an employer, that this system would tend to produce such unison of feeling between the latter and all his workmen, that they would rarely wish to vote differently. The record would, moreover, be a bar to treachery and all secret influences, and a vote of which the voter should be ashamed, will never be given by him.

While the radicals in England have been contending for the ballot, true reformers in America would rather return to the honest and manly system of voting *viva voce*; being convinced that wherever there is secrecy there may be fraud, and that so far from the laborer being at the mercy of an offended employer, intimidation if practised will be from the masses, and capital, not labor, the victim. Only the demagogue, whose in-

fluence is secret and who works in dark places, would retain a system favorable to his intrigues.

The abolition of the system of electoral districts would remove another popular fallacy. If land or the owners of land were alone represented in our Legislative assemblies, there might be some meaning in returning members from these divisions of territory; but, since it is the people who inhabit it whose wishes are to be carried out, whose rights secured, whose interests protected and prosperity advanced, it is difficult to see how one man can represent such discordant elements as constitute the population of any crowded district, especially a large town or city. In a rural district alone can a population be found united in interest, and experience has shown that even among them is often found a greater divergence of opinion upon political matters, than in a population given exclusively to any other form of industry.

A greater tyranny cannot be conceived than to force a large part of any population, even if it be only a minority, to commit the utterance of their wishes and the guardianship of their interests in the National or State government, to a man they cannot trust, and whose enmity they have won by the bitterness of a party contest. In no way can this be avoided but by the adoption of some such system as the one proposed in this essay, and by Mr. Hare.

It is not to be supposed that such a change in our system of representation could be carried without opposition; but no one can honestly say that it is less Democratic than the one it is intended to supersede, unless Democracy consists in putting power into the hands of a few men. Here, all would vote on terms of perfect equality, the electors uniting voluntarily in the choice of members of their own selection, really representing their interests. No vote would be nullified, and on the contrary, every citizen would be really represented by the

man of his choice; frauds in elections would be impossible, nor could any question of electoral returns come before the Legislature to be decided, as it always is, by a strictly party vote.

But of all the advantages arising from the change, the greatest would be in disuse of political caucus, and the end put to primary elections; which together form a system so full of fraud, so incapable of correction, that it must be destroyed, or it will utterly eradicate all public virtue, entirely undermine every principle upon which free institutions are based, and leave us nothing but the knife to eradicate the cancer in our body politic, with small hope indeed of surviving the operation.

If the electoral system, working with such disastrous effect for more than our generation, has not altogether degraded us as a nation, rendering it nearly impossible for a highminded man to enter into politics, or soon destroying his sense of honor by the associations and practices he must tolerate; and leaving no other course for honest ambition but the acquisition of money, a career itself most sadly corroding to the higher sentiments of our nature; if there are still among us a class of independent, patriotic gentlemen; or printers, shoemakers, and blacksmiths, like the Franklins, Shermans, and Greenes of our Revolution, such a system as the one proposed would give them place in our national councils, and invest them with authority to speak as no other representatives could speak, with honesty and boldness, fearing no reproach, and checked by no base party consideration; representing totalities, they would be sure to be sustained while they support the true interests of their constituents; truckling in nothing to those they despise, they would legislate according to their conscientious convictions, for the good of their country; and, when the decision on a great question was made, all must submit to

the will of the real majority of the nation, speaking by their true delegates. Owing their places to no corrupt bargain or base concession, they would be incapable of corruption in their legislative office. Sustained by the whole body of their constituents, who had really chosen them as their organs, they would feel the conscious dignity of men worthily invested with supreme power, and use it only for their country's good, identified as it would be with their own honor and lasting fame.

Is this a dream—a fantastic and impossible idea? Let it not be hastily rejected as such; for it is a scheme to retrieve the honor and honesty of our legislative assemblies, the corruption and degradation of which is the disease our Republic is dying of. Something must be done, or our institutions will speedily perish.

But the greatest of all the problems submitted to us as a nation is still unsolved,—the possibility of electing the Chief Magistrate of a great Republic without corruption and without violence; the invention of a scheme for selecting among all our people a man worthy of the exalted honor and the mighty trust.

If the system of nominating and electing proposed in this essay, for members of Congress, could be applied to the choice of Presidential Electors, we might reasonably hope for the creation of Electoral Colleges consisting of men of character and influence, not the nominees of politicians, or the representatives of party; and, in that case, we should have an effectual realization of the views of those great and patriotic men who framed our Constitution, and whose work has been so lamentably perverted by their descendants.

If we adopt the present basis and proportion of electoral

votes, every elector, corresponding to the representative in Congress, must in the same way obtain a totality vote; and the two Senatorial Electors (as they are sometimes called) might be chosen by the Legislatures of each State; thus varying the mode of election, and giving another chance for a good choice.

When assembled in the Electoral Colleges, each elector should give his independent vote, to be counted as such in the general return,—the object being, as before stated, to frustrate the intrigues of State politicians, and render a sectional candidate impossible.

As this system of counting the individual votes in the general return is more likely to result in a failure to secure at first a majority to any candidate, than the present system, the Electoral Colleges might meet again after the interval of one month; and, if it be found that the election has failed from the number of candidates, a new election might be made, with the choice narrowed to the three candidates who had obtained the highest number of votes at the previous election. This would appear to be safer than to trust the second election to the House of Representatives, as in our present system.

As experience has shown that many evils arise from a long interval between the election and inauguration of a President, the first meeting of the Electoral Colleges might be fixed on the first of December, the second on the first of January; which it is presumed would leave time enough for the President elect to make his preliminary arrangements before the fourth of March.

While it might be hoped that this change of system would result in the formation of such Electoral Colleges as the framers of our present Constitution expected, and that our people, in trusting to a body of their fellow-citizens an office of such high responsibility and dignity as the election of Presi-

dent, would take care that they were worthy of it ; yet the prize of the Presidential office is so high, its powers so great, its patronage so enormous, that we cannot be sure it would not be sought by bad men, and that every elector would be proof against his seductions, and impenetrable by the lust of wealth, or the temptation of office.

It would be well to provide against these evils, and to seek, if we can, some mode of limiting the selection to men qualified for office, by honorable and distinguished service elsewhere ; and at the same time so to diminish the patronage of office, as to render corruption nearly impossible.

The first object might be attained by limiting the selection of candidates to citizens who had at some time been Senators of the United States, and had filled their seats in that dignified assembly for two years at least. This, it is thought, would be attended with double advantage. It would greatly increase the dignity and importance of that body, and secure to the Presidential candidate some experience, not only in legislation, but in statesmanship, while acting as a special adviser of the Executive in diplomatic matters, and in considering his nominations for the great offices of the nation.

The Legislatures of the States, in appointing to the Federal Senate, would recollect that they were nominating to the nation one of their fellow-citizens as a possible candidate for the Presidential office, and would not lightly throw away the advantage to be gained by a good selection, knowing that the greater his virtues and abilities, the greater chance that this high honor would redound to his native State ; while the members of the Senate would feel that the eyes of the whole nation were specially directed to them, as the body from which, or its former members, they must from time to time select their Chief Magistrate. Higher motives to a noble ambition, a greater stimulus to patriotic service cannot be conceived.

This liberty of selection might be extended to all who had filled the offices of Governors of the Federated States, and, perhaps, some other high officials, especially in the Judiciary ; providing, only, that they are not in office at the time of their nomination, the object being to secure ability and integrity proved in the previous tenure of high office.

It would, indeed, be unwise to exclude the military professions from a chance of selection for the highest National honors. In war the noblest qualities are discovered, the best abilities displayed. Washington, Wellington, and Marlborough exhibited in their campaigns talents for diplomacy, statesmanship, and general administration equal to their military skill ; and it would be well to invite from time to time into our legislative councils men whose great qualities have already been exhibited in the tented field. In all the great constitutional monarchies of Europe, many eminent soldiers have seats in the legislative halls ; and in the countries under despotic rule, the first offices of state are often filled by military men. It is quite otherwise in our Republic, where, while we have abundance of generals and colonels in Congress and our State Assemblies, they are men whose title is only an empty pretension to military knowledge or service.

The attainments and experience of educated officers from our military and naval professions, would often be invaluable in the committees to which are assigned the affairs of war ; while the knowledge of the world, of which many have seen much, and their high tone and bearing, would be a most desirable infusion into our legislative assemblies. If officers of the army and navy could be elected to Congress without resigning or losing grade in the service (merely relinquishing for the time their pay and their progressive seniority), they would form a great addition to our legislative strength ; and if appointed by their own States to a place in the National

Senate (an honor very likely to be conferred on those worthy of it), they would thus be placed in the rank of candidates; and should the voice of the Electoral Colleges call them to the Presidential chair, they would not come into office without some experience in the trade of statesmanship.

The last point to be considered is the patronage of office, and its influence on elections. Great as is this evil,—it may be the greatest in our land, as affecting the honor of our statesmen and the morality of our politics,—its removal seems to be easy, if we have the will to do it.

The President, as the great executive head of the nation, must be placed above this miserable business. There is not a department in which it would not be a gain to him, as well as to the nation, to place all appointments in other hands.

The highest functionaries of State, the Cabinet officers, and the foreign representatives of the country must be under his control; but the great departments of the army, navy, and treasury might be entirely committed to permanent boards; at which, if desired, the Ministers of State might preside, but which might safely be trusted to fill the places for which they best know the qualifications. The Post Office need have no connection with the Executive. The local postmasters indeed might be safely left to popular elections.

If the nomination of the members of great departmental boards be given to the Executive with the consent of the Senate, there should be *no power of removal* except for misconduct or incompetence, *verified before the Senate*; and the appointment of the inferior officers in their departments, including the whole military service, if requiring the assent of the minister at its head, should be ever after beyond his control, except for similar causes. In this way, great official independence and honor would be inspired, and high qualifications secured by education in the grades of office. In no other

country than ours are all the officials liable to displacement on each popular election; and in no country on earth is there such incompetence among them.

The nomination of the Federal Judiciary must, of course, be left to the Executive; but if confirmation required a three-fourths vote of the Senate, the appointment would be taken out of party politics; while, if the courts had the power of temporarily supplying vacancies on their own benches, they would effectually stop all factious opposition to a good appointment.

The interpretation given to the constitutional powers of the President in the early days of our Republic, when the character of Washington and his successor seemed to guarantee us against appointments from corrupt or purely party motives, was most unfortunate. It was not supposed possible that a capable and faithful officer could be removed for a vote hostile to the Executive, or to give place to one whose only merit was his electioneering services to a new President; and the knowledge that occasional emergencies must arise calling for prompt action, when the Senate could not be consulted, was, probably, the cause of acquiescence in the peremptory power of removal.

The evil consequences of this concession were never fully realized till the election of General Jackson, who first introduced the pernicious and tyrannical practice of punishing all opponents in public places, and giving their offices to his friends and supporters. From that time, parties in this country became thoroughly corrupt. Men fought not for principles but for offices and spoils. Implicit subservience to the dictates of party was insisted on by its leaders. Our political caucuses and conventions became marts where principles and votes were sold for promises of office and contracts; and the advent of a new President or Governor filled the Na-

tional or State capital with hungry hordes,—men without character or worth, claiming for themselves places of honor and trust, to which they, of all men, were least entitled by tried ability or honesty.

The framers of the Constitution of the Confederate States have denied the power of removal from office by the arbitrary will of the Executive ; and it is to be hoped, whatever may be the result of our national divisions, that this constitutional provision may be adopted by us.

A peremptory dismissal of a Cabinet officer or their confidential clerks is a necessary power. A temporary suspension from office might be conceded to the great departmental boards, or perhaps to their heads. A power of recall from foreign missions may be necessary, but always to be submitted with statement of causes to the Senate. Here all power over the occupants of office should end. Official integrity, the faithful and intelligent performance of duty requires it; above all, the relief of our electoral system from the most extensive and flagrant corruption demands it.

Take away this power, and our Electoral Colleges will be relieved from every suspicion of baseness and intrigue. Choose our electors in the manner previously suggested, and they will unite in selecting for us, from all the nation, the men most deserving of our confidence by their public services and unquestioned abilities. Party, as it is now understood, would be annihilated. Great public questions would undoubtedly interest and excite a great and free and intelligent people, and have influence in elections, but in the choice of a First Magistrate, we may be sure they never would be cheated into the election of a man neither qualified for his place by his talents, his education, his experience, or his integrity.

And what an accession of independence and dignity would

it not give to the Chief of our nation, placed above all base, all party influences, and occupied solely with affairs of state!

We can hardly doubt his being actuated by the noblest patriotism in all his acts. His influence in our legislative bodies would be great, but always legitimate, for he could buy no votes for his favorite measures; his foreign and national policy would always be upright, for purely party considerations would be impossible for a man so selected.

Personal dignity might always be expected, for his selection would surely be made from the first men of the nation, and his associations could never be degrading. No rowdy ruffian with his troop of bullies could march triumphantly in the inaugural cortege, or force himself as a guest into the Presidential mansion; no base intriguer could claim his patronage in reward for services disgraceful to both. While claiming no prerogative of birth, no advantages from wealth, rising as he might well do from humble rank by successive stages of merit, he would prove to the world that the wisest Democracy can produce a gentleman, and knows how to honor him.

One of the evils of the existing system of election which has been often remarked, arises from their frequency. Hardly is one election closed, before plans are laid for another. The defeated party at once begins its assaults upon the newly elected member, and both prepare with increased animosity for a new contest.

This constant excitement is most unfavorable to a sound condition of the public mind on political subjects; and moreover, as all citizens cannot give their time to this incessant political warfare and intrigue, the work must needs be done by the mercenary army of politicians of all grades, which our vicious system has created and must continue to foster.

It has been proposed to diminish this evil by extending the

term of office both of our Chief Magistrate and also of our political assemblies; but a little reflection will show how eminently unfair and pernicious this extension would be under our present system of electing by fictitious majorities.

Disfranchised as are all the citizens not voting for the successful candidate,—a class often embracing a real majority, and still more frequently containing the largest proportion of those whose education is the highest, and whose interests are the greatest in the community,—utterly disregarded as are all their rights and wishes, even when unquestionably expressed, by the representative of their political enemies, who is sure to take every advantage of victory,—the prolongation of his term would be oppressive and tyrannical, giving time to the unprincipled men who are the dictators of the party to secure, if they can, by iniquitous legislation, the power acquired by fraud, or to complete the ruin of the State by misgovernment and plunder, before handing it over to their political enemies. Those who have felt the misfortune and disgrace of being constantly misrepresented in the national Executive and councils; those who are aware of the irremediable mischief to be done, even in their present brief tenure of office, by an unprincipled minority party, will never consent to increase the evil by the prolongation of its power.

But adopt the system here proposed, of electing by totalities, and every objection to a prolonged term disappears. The member elect has no enemies in the rear. He has no battle to fight at home. He really represents the whole body of his constituents. His selection is the very expression of their wishes: he is sure to take counsel with and for them, and to defend all their rights and interests. The President elect has been the choice of a real majority of the nation,—not nominated by intriguers, but selected by men most capable of judging of capacity and worth, and raised to office for

merits and services proved in other capacities. In both cases power may safely be trusted, for it will not be abused. In both, a prolongation of office is not only convenient, but desirable. As it would probably be renewed by re-election, there is the best reason for prolonging the term. Frequent elections, so essential under the present system, to protect private rights and secure an expression of public wishes, would be here unnecessary; and the evil of frequent changes and constant political agitation would be obviated, without encountering a greater evil,—the consolidation of party despotism.

This is believed to be the last topic to which it is necessary to advert,—the evil of false majorities being mainly confined to the choice of the members of our legislative bodies and the Presidential election.

The executive officers of the various States and counties must be elected by simple majorities; and whatever frauds or abuses may exist in these elections, can be safely left for correction to the Legislatures of the States, if they are fairly chosen according to the principle here advocated.

It would be a trespass on the time and patience of the reader of these pages, if more were added.

The monstrous evils of our present representative system have been exposed, and a plan suggested, which, if practicable, would seem to promise a removal of all these evils. It would require very long and careful study to adapt it to a practical working result. Difficulties may suggest themselves demanding essential changes; and, although the machinery for voting seems simple enough, there are numerous contingencies to be met with suitable contrivances. Some of them have already occurred to the writer; but it does not at present seem necessary to suggest them. It is sufficient now to de-

velop a general plan, which it is hoped may be intelligible to all. Like many other fair and promising schemes, it may be a mere illusion; but if it turns other minds into similar trains of thought, the result may be the discovery of some method of electing, more practical, more efficient, and better suited to our American people.

If our country is saved from degradation by any other means, it will be no mortification to the author of the present scheme, that his plan has been neglected and forgotten.

